

Statement of Senator Orrin G. Hatch
Before the United States Senate Transportation Conference Committee
“Overall Funding”
July 7, 2004

I think if we voted our conscience right now on what an acceptable number would be, the higher number of \$318 billion would win hands down. As Chairman Inhofe has outlined, we need to pass a bill with the highest funding level possible this year.

A second concern I have is that the Senate Finance Committee, under the leadership of Chairman Grassley, took great pains to ensure the \$318 billion was paid for. Why wouldn't we pass a transportation bill that is paid for? We have not raided the general funds of the United States, we have not cut other important government programs, instead we have cracked down on fuel tax evaders and changed the way fuel tax is captured in order to produce the needed revenues. I have heard the arguments that some of the tax offsets in the Senate bill are also contained in the FSC/ETI bill. There's nothing new about that approach. The offsets can only be used once, so I say, let's finalize this bill now at \$318 billion and let it be the first one to reach the President's desk. Our nation's highway and transit systems need all the infrastructure we can provide.

Nevertheless, I understand the important role compromise plays in the conference process. If it means we can get a six year bill done this year, then I am willing to look at a number slightly below the Senate number. I don't know exactly what that number would be right now, I will need to see how the funding formulas break out for the State of Utah under a lower number, but I am willing to consider it if it means we can get something done this year.